



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

form logical steps in an answer to the child's question: "What is it all for?"

LEONARD THOMPSON TROLAND.

CLEVELAND, OHIO.

## THE OBJECT OF PERCEPTION *VERSUS* THE OBJECT OF THOUGHT<sup>1</sup>

**I**NFLUENCED by pragmatism, we have become accustomed to thinking of perceptions as plans of action. As such, they are at once anticipations of motor adjustment and promises of result, pleasant or unpleasant. Although a perception is thus a plan of action it is also an interpretation in terms of past experience functioning as an ideal system. Movements are anticipated through ideas which are themselves universals and synthesize many experiences of motor adjustment; promised results take the form of ideal qualities, universal in their meaning.

But while the content of perception is ideal and thus possessed of universality, the object perceived is a particular thing existing here and now for a living individual. We assign the object of perception to a world quite different from that of our ideas; we attribute actual existence to the object we perceive. This we do because a perception is certified to at the time we experience it by objective reality. It is in fact an interpretation selected by objective reality. How, now, does reality select and thus confer objectivity upon certain of our interpretations? It does this by the control which it exercises over the movements which the interpretations instantly call forth. These are movements of adjusting the sensory apparatus, usually of sight and hearing. When these movements are permitted to proceed without hindrance and intelligence is stimulated thereby to fill out and complete the interpretation which evoked (the supplementary features being in their turn often followed by added movements which call to attention further qualities, and so on), the interpretation in question is verified; its existence as an object is perceived. When, on the contrary, the attempted movements are frustrated or prevented by objective conditions, the interpretation is rejected as invalid, the object which it supposed is proved non-existent, and another interpretation must be made.

A perception is therefore an interpretation based on past experience and inducing an immediate adjustment which if it proceeds unimpeded imparts objectivity to the interpretation. Unfamiliar objects are frequently perceived through a series of interpretations

<sup>1</sup> Read at the meeting of the Western Philosophical Association, St. Louis, April 21, 1916.

made under control of objective reality, each more definite than the last. When adjustments by which the living individual maintains his position are interfered with, he is forced to reinterpret his objective environment as the condition of a new adjustment. His first interpretation may be very general: he perceives "some sort of thing over there." This interpretation induces those movements of eye-muscles required to follow out with his gaze the definite outlines which such an existing object will have in contradistinction from a mere shadow. But such a vague general interpretation is only a beginning of a perception of the object. Suppose that an object has thus been perceived by me on the lower part of the table in the far corner of the room. The idea of a book first comes to my mind, but my attempt to trace the outline of the supposed book is frustrated by a sharp break on the upper edge. I think of a flat box which often sits on top of the table, but the broken line still impedes my attempted adjustment. Finally an idea of the box with the cover partly out of place occurs to me and the movements which this interpretation evokes are permitted to proceed unhindered, with the result that further details of the appearance of the box are suggested to my mind. Of course I perceive the object as a box with the cover partly off in much less time than this description consumes, but the description is nevertheless a true account of the process of perception.

We have agreed to define the perception as a plan of action involving both an anticipation of movement and a promise of satisfaction. Yet the movements by which the perception is verified are not ordinarily those which are anticipated in its meaning, nor are its qualities the results desired. The movements represented in the perception are primarily those of the whole body in appropriating the object, and the satisfactions are those expected when it is put to the use for which it is intended. The movements instantly evoked by the initial interpretation, however, are adjustments of the sensory apparatus suited to prove the existence of qualities in the object whose presence guarantees in advance of more extensive movement that the results desired will follow when these latter movements are made. Thus perception serves to forecast the results of action and thus to economize the effort of the agent. The movements by which we approach and utilize the object perceived constitute a further and more conclusive verification of the perception: the tactual sense is, as we say, the final court of appeal. But the process of verification, of realizing an ideal content, is the same in the case of action as it is in simple perception, the only difference being that as the course of action is more prolonged the essential factors are more easily discerned. The sequence of movements which idea or per-

ception suggests is actually undertaken. In case these intended movements are permitted to continue unimpeded, the qualities for which the object is desired are established and accentuated in the consciousness of the agent. It is through such interplay of movement and meaning, and this only, that an ideal content attains objective reality.

To summarize: the kind of existence possessed by the perceived object is determined by the control exercised by objective reality over human action, and, since by action is always meant the motor adjustments of an individual, the object of perception always exists at a particular time and place in an individual experience.

The thought-object, on the contrary, exists as a universal: not only has it content which is universal because ideal, but it has also existence which is universal because it generalizes individual experiences of effort and satisfaction. The concept is an identification of objects which play a similar part in all human conduct. The relations which constitute the meaning of such concepts are of two kinds because the functions which objects discharge in voluntary action are of two main sorts. Such objects are either links or steps in sequences of movement or else they are sources of satisfaction. Conceptual objects are therefore possessed either of spatial attributes, and thus subject to mechanical causation, or of the properties of freedom and inner development. The meaning of most common concepts (chair, table, house, etc.), is constituted by both these types of relation: they are at once extended objects having location, size, shape, etc., depending in their construction and use upon definite kinds of motor adjustment, and also objects of value having many possibilities of use and promising a variety of satisfactions. Systematic thought, however, tends to distinguish ever more sharply between these two kinds of meaning, separating mechanical concepts from concepts of value. Natural science eliminates all secondary qualities from the physical world and conceives it entirely in terms of motion, and materialistic philosophy endeavors to expel the teleological principle from the domain of thought altogether. Religious thought, on the other hand, seeks to subordinate matter and mechanism to purpose and freedom, while idealistic philosophy attempts to organize all objects of thought within the unity of a single comprehensive purpose.

But how, one may ask, do concepts gain objectivity? They claim to be true, to agree with reality. Are our thoughts subject to any control comparable to that exercised by objective conditions over our movements. Such control, or one analogous to it, is exercised over our thinking, by the accepted body of knowledge. This sums up and systematizes man's experiences of pursuit and attainment;

it rests ultimately upon the direct verification which the ideas of individuals receive in perception and action. Accepted knowledge requires all thoughts to be consistent with itself if they are to share its objectivity. Such consistency is tested in different ways. The thought in question may be identical with an idea already verified in points so essential that the realization of the former is imagined in so vivid and convincing a fashion as to impart to it objectivity. More commonly the system of generally accepted knowledge controls the thinking of individuals through the instrumentality of the speech-mechanism. Accepted truth is formulated in discourse, oral and written, and received by the individual through social heredity. Every new thought he must put in words; every new conception he must define in language. If knowledge already formulated offers no hindrance to the new proposition by contradicting wholly or in part, but rather, by implication, gives it support, it is also accepted as true. In case contradiction or confusion does arise, of course the idea is rejected.

Thought-objects are generalized experiences of action or appreciation; their universality is based upon the unity of will characteristic of all human individuals. Thought represents objects that are possible of realization by all voluntary agents. In the nature and workings of volition, therefore, we find the desired explanation of the opposition between conception and perception, thought and existence. To the regular operation of will two activities are essential. First, a choice must be made among ends in accordance with the promise of satisfaction they severally hold forth. Objects when thus considered as ends are conceived, being the generalized results of past experience, individual and racial, and involving conceptions of movement and result. They are also ideal in the sense of being non-existent, because out of harmony with the actual motor adjustment of the individual. If such an end, once chosen, is to be realized, the second power essential to the operation of volition must be exercised. The sequence of movements believed necessary for the realization of the object must be actually initiated and carried through. Only such movements can be made as objective reality permits, and these movements transform the chosen end from a mere idea into an existing object in case they succeed in finally bringing about such a harmony between the motor adjustments of the agent and the qualities he desires to experience that the movements actually at his command are such as maintain and intensify these qualities in his consciousness. In this unique experience of satisfaction or fulfilment an idea which in its meaning gives expression to the unity and freedom of personal volition acquires objectivity because it is brought into definite connection with the system of movements which the

agent is permitted to make, and is thus constituted a point of departure for the direction of further movements. When in this way an object is once realized through activities that can be observed, remembered, and described, it can be re-experienced at will by human individuals. It is consequently given a place in the objective order, the world that exists for all voluntary agents. This actual world is a conceptual system; the objects which compose it are universals because they represent possibilities of realization for all human individuals. The realization of an end involves, as we have seen, the cooperation of the two activities of selection and movement. The two fundamental types of relation by which experiences are correlated and given meaning as objects of thought are those of mechanism and teleology. If we add to these the principle of identity based upon the underlying unity of volition itself, we have the three fundamental thought-forms or categories.

HENRY W. WRIGHT.

LAKE FOREST COLLEGE.

## PURPOSE, CHANCE, AND OTHER PERPLEXING CONCEPTS

IN a recent note on my discussion of the entelechial interpretation of purpose,<sup>1</sup> Professor Lawrence J. Henderson appears to rest his own theory of teleology on the "uniqueness" of a certain ensemble of physical and chemical characteristics of the three elements which figure most prominently in organic compounds. It was against this very type of argument that my criticism was directed. In medieval science this mode of reasoning was common enough. The circle is a unique figure; hence the planets *must* move in circles. Seven is a unique number—the highest prime under ten; hence, there must be seven planets; there can be no more, no less. With all due appreciation of Professor Henderson's wide knowledge of chemistry and physics, it would seem that he has selected a lot of striking characters, enumerated them, called the combination "unique," and from this has argued to a teleological view of the universe.

Against this conclusion it may be urged, (1) that "uniqueness" of itself carries little weight, since there are hundreds of "unique" combinations of properties in the world, some of which are important, others not. (2) That the *value* of the "unique" combination of characteristics which Professor Henderson has studied can only be determined by making a corresponding study of the *unfit* characteristics which go with them. This would furnish the denominator of the fraction whose numerator Professor Henderson has (I believe) very fairly evaluated.

<sup>1</sup> This JOURNAL, Vol. XIII., pp. 325 ff.